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UTTARANCHAL STATE AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

Dr. P.N. Pande

Uttaranchal State, which came into existence on 9th November 2000, is comprised of 13 districts, viz., Pithoragarh, Champawat, Almora, Bageshwar, Nainital, Udham Singh Nagar, Uttar Kashi, Chamoli, Rudraprayag, Dehradun, Pauri, Tehri Garhwal and Haridwar. The state lies in the central zone of Himalayas and covers an area of 53484 sq. kms. According to the 1991 census, the population of Uttaranchal state stood at 70.50 lakhs which had increased at the rate of 23.12 per cent during 1981-91. The provisional figures of 2001 census indicate that in the last decade, the population of this state has increased by 15.60 per cent and reached upto 81.50 lakhs. In the total population, 51.63 per cent were males and 48.37 per cent were females in 1991. Thus, the number of females was 937 per 1000 males. According to 1991 census, the population of scheduled castes and scheduled Tribes constituted 17.48 per cent and 2.68 per cent respectively. The literacy rate was 57.67 per cent being 72.25 per cent among male population and 41.67 per cent among females during 1991 in Uttaranchal state State. About 76.82 per cent population live in the rural areas and agriculture continues to be the main stay of the people. Out of total 5563174 hectares of reporting area of the state, about 62.31 per cent area is under forest. For agriculture purpose only 762 thousand hectares land is available which is 14.24 per cent of the total reporting area and of the total agriculture land 40.66 per cent area is irrigated. Here it would be worthwhile to mention that in hill region of the state, the irrigated area is less than 16.0 per cent of the net area sown.

About 88 per cent of the total geographical area of Uttranchal state is in hill area rest 12 per cent area in plain region. On account of undulating topography, rugged terrain, varied climate and poor soil cover, the hill region of Uttaranchal state suffers from various constraints of development. The factors severely inhibiting the pace of development are the very limited arable land, overwhelming percentage of small and marginal holdings, fragmented land holdings, difficult agricultural conditions, sparse pattern of human settlement, severe soil erosion, deficiencies in infrastructure and amenities, inadequate institutional support, long gestation period of project and low returns on investment. Furthermore, the rapid depletion of natural resources has aggravated the problem associated in its environment and ecology. Inadequate development of technologies suitable for hill areas, unscientific management of natural resources and unsuitable land use patterns have resulted in the low productivity on the one hand and depletion of natural resources and ecological degradation on the other.

After a long struggle of the people in hill region of Uttar Pradesh, for a separate state, Uttaranchal state is formed. The motive of the people behind their struggle for a separate state was to make the region prosperous by making rapid economic development on sustainable manner. Uttaranchal region has remained to be economically depressed and politically ineffective. Although several efforts have been made through planned development strategies for overall development of the region since independence, but the problems associated with its backwardness remained unsolved. Keeping in view the level of backwardness of Uttaranchal State, there is an urgent need to frame a strategic policy for formulating suitable planning and developing economic factors which have the potential for development. Uttaranchal state has inherited certain basic problems in its way of economic

development. The development programmes and extension services rendered so far could not match the requirements of the region. It is a matter of great surprise that in spite of the availability of rich natural resources, the Uttaranchal region suffers from its backwardness and political isolation, even several developmental efforts were undertaken during the planned economic development. Because of adverse geographical conditions, undeveloped infrastructural base and poor economic structure, the hill region needs a different planning package for its overall development by giving proper emphasis to the priorities in the development strategy. At its initial stage, Uttaranchal government faces the various challenges in the process of overall development of the state. Without giving proper attention to the challenges, it would be a difficult task for the government to solve the problem of its backwardness. The redressal of these problems (challenges) needs a comprehensive policy package of appropriate and concrete measures for the development of the state. A positive state policy towards its development can play a significant role in this direction.

The first and foremost challenge in its development is the problem associated with the degraded environment and ecological imbalance of Uttaranchal state. There is direct relation of environmental problem and depletion of natural resources with the forests. Forests are very important resources in any region and play a very significant role in the process of economic development. As a result of the indiscriminate felling of trees for commercial purpose and pressure on forests for domestic purposes, the forest have gradually disappeared from Uttaranchal region. The problems of the people for their survival are linked with the forests. The problems associated with drinking water, fuel wood, fodder, soil erosion, ecological imbalances and depletion of natural resources have emerged due to deforestation.

Particularly during the last three decades, the exploitation of forest resources has taken place mercilessly in the hills of Uttaranchal state. The forest profile of the newly created state reveals that there is severe danger for environment which poses a challenge for the existence of living creatures, particularly for human beings. A solid and concrete policy measure is required at the earliest for the protection and conservation of forest wealth. Then only other development measures have their meaning in the overall development process in Uttaranchal state.

For the economic development of any region, a strong network of infrastructural facilities has significant role. Particularly for hill region, extension and development of infrastructural facilities is very crucial, because of hard nature of geographical structure and difficult climatic conditions. The development of basic necessary infrastructural facilities in the region is the second challenge in front of the government, as these facilities are not properly developed in the hill area of Uttaranchal state. The development and extension of roads, transport system, banks and financial institutions, drinking water, power, educational institutions, vocational training centres, telephones, post offices, medical and health, information technology etc. are the main items of infrastructural facilities which require priority in the development strategy of the government to boost up the economy of the state.

Out migration of population, particularly among male members from villages to the towns and cities is one of the most important features of the demographic structure in the hill region of Uttaranchal state. The high incidence of out-migration of able-bodied males from the hill areas compels the women-folk to step into the local labour force in large number to earn means of living for their families. One most important characteristic feature of the hill districts of Uttranchal state is the presence of a substantially high proportion of female workers in the work force. The

work participation rate among females is comparatively higher (25.62%) in the state than that of other states. Due to lack of employment opportunities in other sectors of economy, women generally are engaged in low productivity activities in primary sector of the economy. This process reflects the high incidence of out-migration of able-bodied males from the region which increases the burden of work on female members in addition to their responsibility of performing the activities related to daily household chores. Low income and inadequate employment opportunities due to weak agricultural and industrial base, force people to migrate from the region. The workload and drudgery is associated with the hill women from the very beginning of their childhood. Though, the migrant households receive remittances from the migrants which definitely increase the purchasing power of the families and enhance the asset formation, but it is at the cost of increased work burden on the women folk which leaves no scope for their personality development. Due to lack of employment avenues in the hill region, people are forced to migrate from the region. Now it is the responsibility of government to strengthen the economic structure and to develop the infrastructural facilities for increasing the employment opportunities, so that the migration rate can be minimised. Fragmentation of human settlement and sparse population in the hill areas need the employment opportunities based on self-employment as the natural resources are suitable for promoting self employment schemes on the one hand, and the limitations of an industry-led development strategy in the hill areas on the other.

One of the most important characteristics of hill economy of Uttarakhand state is that the work participation rate among female population is comparatively higher than the male population. This rate is many times higher than the work participation rate of women in other areas. The out-migration of male members has increased the

workload on womenfolk. The research studies conducted in this regard indicated that a woman in hill area has to perform the hard work for more than 16 hours in a day. Due to ignorance, illiteracy, lack of awareness, tendency of migration among male members, lack of employment opportunities, lack of freedom in economic matters, hardship of geographical conditions and adverse climatic conditions, the socio-economic statue of most of the women in the region is miserable. The state government is required to chalk-out the effective programmes for bringing an improvement in the socio-economic conditions of women in order to reduce their drudgery and to secure their integrated development by taking into consideration the availability of natural resources, appropriate technology and environment. At the time of formulation of women-related development schemes, emphasis should be given to production-oriented and income generating self-employment schemes for empowering women in the region. A holistic approach for the development of women requires serious and meaningful efforts in the over all development perspective.

The natural and human resources in Uttarakhand state have enough potential for its strong economic base. The proper use of geographical situation, natural resources and the forest wealth will improve not only the economic condition of the people in the state but it will also make the state self-sufficient. At this juncture, the development of this state needs, efficient administration, dutiful attitude, dedication, effective policy, right planning and low cost suitable technologies for this region. Diversification of agriculture into high-value of horticulture crops also hold considerable promise for the hill region of Uttarakhand State. The value of out-put per unit area from vegetables and fruits in the state is many times higher than from traditional crops. The impact of such diversification on natural resources is equally

important because this region is ecologically fragile. Except of few places in valley areas, the hill region is not suitable for the development and extension of agriculture. It is recognized that the hill areas have a comparative advantage in horticulture and agro-processing which is favourable in increasing income levels besides being environment-friendly. Emphasis must be given to shift from food-grains to high value of commercial crops, such as vegetables, medicinal plants, fruits, mushroom etc. The land terrain and climate in hills is most suitable for growing tea plants. According to experts, Uttarakhand State has at least 50 places where tea plantation is extremely suitable at a very large scale. The establishment of small industries based on horticultural crops, forest wealth, tea-gardening, herbal and medicinal plants in this region will open opportunities of employment for local people which will increase the income levels on the one hand, it will check the migration of people from this region to a great extent. In addition to employment and income, the horticulture will check the soil erosion and water depletion process in the region.

Uttarakhand with its rich culture and religious heritage, fascinating scenic beauty and wonderful flora and fauna has immense tourist potential. Development of tourism in hills is very important which can play a vital role in the economy of the state. Mountain tourism is an area that has the potential for providing alternative environmentally – friendly income and employment generation opportunities. The response of tourist income has a great significance in the local economic system. The multiplier effect of this response is a typical phenomenon working on income and employment scales together. The tourist places of Uttarakhand occupy pride of place on the tourist map of India. The resorts in the hills are indeed a tourist paradise, offering to the tourists, religious shrines, historical places, aesthetic landscape, scenic beauty and variety of seasonal sports. Tourism is a remunerative

and growing industry, which has several aspects. It includes all aspect of trade, such as transport, shop keeping, catering, entertainment, refreshment, meals, medical services, information and other various services which are purchased by the visitors. The tourism industry in Uttarakhand state is suffering from various problems in its development. The main lacuna in the development of tourism industry is that the tourist places are not well connected by good roads with each other. The shortage of transport facilities is the another problem associated with the tourism industry. By increasing accommodation facilities and transport network and by augmenting essential infrastructural facilities, the tourism industry can boost up the economy of the state. Keeping in view, the geographical conditions and topography of Uttarakhand, tourism should be managed such a way that it should lead to sustainable mountain and community development. Tourism should be oriented towards sustainable economic, social, cultural and environmental development of local communities. Accessibility of information related to tourism in the state should be made available to the tourists. A strong network of information technology can play an important role in the development of tourism industry in the state.

One of the most important resources Uttarakhand State possesses is water. The hill area of the state has steep gradient perennial streams providing ample scope for power generation. The huge amount of water has been left untapped due to the indifferent attitude of government in the past. There is a huge gap between energy demand and energy supply in the state. At present, less than half of the population in the state is able to consume electricity. Most of the energy needs, such as cooking, space heating are met from fuel wood as a result, deforestation and environmental degradation is taking place at an alarming rate. Other non-conventional energy sources, such as solar power, wind energy, bio-gas energy are

hardly used. Adequate attention was not paid to the development of hydel power in the region as a result the micro-hydel plants installed so far have a total capacity of only about 1000 MW, while total potential in the region is estimated to be 18000 MW. A large scale programme for installing mini-and micro-hydel plants should be given priority in the development strategy for Uttaranchal state. The development of micro-hydel plants at large scale may require changes in government policy encouraging private sector participation. With the availability of adequate electricity, many new economic activities could be started which will open avenues for employment opportunities in the region. Experience can be learned from China where thousands of small micro-hydel projects are serving the need of the people living in the remote areas.

Women constitute the backbone of the Himalayan economic system of Uttaranchal state as hill agriculture is absolutely dependent on them. The participation of women in economic and non-economic activities is considerably higher in the region, as they remain busy in performing agricultural work, attending cattle heads, collecting fuel, fodder and water and doing household chores. Women undoubtedly play a unique role in the socio-economic set-up of the hill economy. They are over-burdened with work and even after so many years of all round planned economic development and specific development programmes of government for the upliftment of womenfolk, there has not been any significant improvement in their lifestyle. The high incidence of drudgery associated with the womenfolk of Uttaranchal state could easily be estimated by the heavy work load on them, their low status in the society, lack of general awareness among them, poor health and low profile of their perception and out look. While designing development policies, gender discrimination and inequality of resources among women folk must

also enter into consideration of policy planners. Some value-added process in agro-based industries, packaging, processing could easily be developed at the grass-root level by imparting adequate vocational and technical skills to womenfolk. Economic independence would help in accelerating the pace and result in improving the status of women. Empowerment of women is possible to a great extent by developing entrepreneurship capability among them. To make them economically independent the women should be given vocational training in different fields, such as tailoring, kitchen gardening, tea-gardening, vegetable growing, fruit preservation, mushroom growing, embroidery, knitting, weaving, painting, etc. The handicraft activities based on natural resources and the local available raw materials have large scope in providing employment and income opportunities. Proper planning strategies towards the development of craft activities can be initiated so that enterprises could be most important instrument for creating employment opportunities.

Uttaranchal state has been given a category of 'Special Status' by the Central Government. The state government is expected to derive all the benefits from such provisions. The better use of the provisions under the category of special status could lead the economic development at a faster rate in the state. The expectations and aspirations of the people living in the state could be fulfilled by the approach of integrated development of the state in a suitable manner.

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